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ABSTRACT

Description can make a piece of writing come alive. This lesson plan combines art and word play, emphasizing writing for an audience while drawing on multiple intelligences. Peer review and feedback reinforces the revision process as students create trading cards by drawing pictures of monsters and describing and categorizing them in detail. During two 50-minute sessions, gradé 3 to 5 students will: self-edit to see what kind of details they currently use in writing and revise for clarity and creativity; give feedback to their peers on use of descriptive language; improve the amount and quality of description in their writing based on feedback from their peers; and make the connection between graphical elements and use of details in writing. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A monster trading card template; a rubric for monster trading cards; and a monster trading card example are attached. (PM)

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Powerful Writing: Description in Creating Monster Trading Cards

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Grade Band

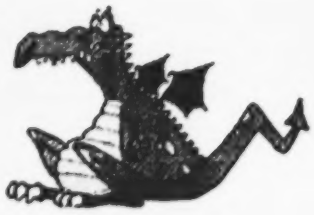
3-5

Estimated Lesson Time

Two 50-minute sessions

Overview

Students create their own monster trading cards using "powerful," vivid language to describe their creatures. Descriptive imagery and word choice combine with visual elements to create a cross-disciplinary menagerie in your class.



From Theory to Practice

Word play allows students to learn language in a creative environment. Moreover, allowing students to play with the language opens up opportunities to increase their vocabulary and extend it to other disciplines. As Nilsen and Nilsen (2000) point out, "[W]e are suggesting that it's time to develop a process approach to teaching vocabulary. Because of international communication and new technologies, the English language is changing faster today than it has at any time since the Norman conquest. . . . We need to give students experience not just in memorizing words and their meanings, but in synthesizing, analyzing, and interacting with words" (32).

This lesson allows students to create original names for monsters of their own creation while also stressing the use of vivid details in their description of their creations.

Nilsen, Alleen Pace, and Don L. F. Nilsen. 2000. "Language Play in Y2K: Morphology Brought to You by Pokemon." *Voices from the Middle.* (May): 32–37.

Student Objectives

Students will

- self-edit to see what kind of details they currently use in writing and revise for clarity and creativity.
- give feedback to their peers on use of descriptive language.
- improve the amount and quality of description in their writing based on feedback from their peers.
- make the connection between graphical elements and use of details in writing.

Resources

- Monster Card Template
- Monster Card Rubric

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CS 512 144

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- Example Monster Card
- Narrative and Descriptive Writing Prompts Web Site
- Descriptive Writing Techniques Web Site

Instructional Plan

Resources

- General Classroom Materials (crayons, markers, pencils)
- Monster Card Template

Preparation

Print out the Monster Card Template for each student and provide them with drawing materials. If students have access to computers, they can type in their monster descriptions directly on the template before printing it out.

Instructions and Activities

1. Begin with a whole-class discussion on the types of monsters students would know from literature, comics, cartoons, and trading-card games such as Yu-Gi-Oh!®. Ask them what characteristics they like or dislike about them, why, and how they might change them if they had the chance.
2. Write on the board a list of the words and short phrases the class uses to describe their likes and dislikes. This should not merely be a litany of adjectives; note how they allude to active characteristics such as a monster's manner of speech, its weaknesses, how and what it eats, and so on, allowing for reference points for when they create their own monsters.
3. Pass out copies of the template (have many extras on hand for those who want to start over) and tell the class that they have an opportunity to be the creator, both artist and writer, of an altogether new monster.
4. Have the kids draw whatever type of monster they choose, giving it a name, type, description, etc., following the template. They should be free to go back and forth from the drawing to the writing, adding details to each to enhance their creature's uniqueness. This Example Monster Card could serve as a model to get them started.
5. In the next session have groups of three to four share their cards, giving feedback on how the details can be enhanced by adding more "powerful" (i.e., vivid and specific) words to describe each monster. You may choose to let each group use the Monster Card Rubric to facilitate their feedback.
6. Students then revise their written descriptions and drawings, if necessary. New templates can be used if the students desire, or if they are happy with their drawings but need to rewrite, they can cut on the fold and keep the drawing but tape or glue a revised description to the back of the original drawing.

Extensions

1. Students can create multiple cards, and their peers (or themselves) can give them "values" based on the Monster Card Rubric or other criteria to trade or compete with each other.
2. Have students write a fairy tale featuring their monsters. Encourage them to be creative with place names and other characters' names, employing similar strategies they used to describe their monsters in this lesson.

Web Resources

Descriptive Writing Techniques
http://www.montanalife.com/writing/descriptive_writing_techniques.html
This site gives you different methods to help with adding description to writing.

Narrative and Descriptive Writing Prompts
http://wizard.hprtec.org/builder/worksheet.php3?ID=1309
This site gives excellent prompts for students to use for descriptive writing activities.

Student Assessment/Reflections

The Monster Card Rubric can be used to assess the students' final cards. Observation of small-group feedback and individual revision strategies could also play a part in the assessment.

NCTE/IRA Standards

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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Monster Trading Card Template

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Fill in the descriptive details about your monster in the lower half of the card. There are tips to help you decide what to write.
2. Print the card.
3. Cut the card out along the edges.
4. Fold the card in half on the fold line, and tape or glue the card together.
5. Draw your monster on the front of the card.

FOLD HERE

WRITING TIPS

Name: *What is your monster's first name?*

Monster Type: *What kind or variety of monster is it?*

Description: *What does the monster look and sound like?*

Habitat: *Where does the monster live?*

Prey/Food: *What does the monster eat?*

Other Characteristics: *What other special details stand out about your monster?*

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Rubric for Monster Trading Cards

	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	Score
MONSTER TYPE NAME	Powerless as a result of a general, unimaginative name.	Power decreased by half as the result of a general or unimaginative name.	Power increased by a specific or imaginative name. Word choice may be fairly obvious.	Maximum power achieved by use of a specific name with creative word choice.	
USE OF DETAILS	Attack fatally weakened by inconsistencies, misleading and/or general information.	Strong attack flawed by more than a few inconsistencies or general information.	Executes a powerful attack with strong details, but weakened by a few inconsistencies or general information.	A force to be reckoned with, this card uses explicit, vivid details.	
GRAPHIC ELEMENTS	Card left powerless by missing or inappropriate graphics.	Power of this card decreased by incomplete or inappropriate graphics.	Power of this card increased by the required graphic elements, most of which were appropriate	Card draws maximum power by including complete and appropriate graphic elements.	
OVERALL APPEAL	Lack of connection between graphics and details rob this card of all power.	Differences between graphics and details reduce the power of this card.	Power of the card enhanced by some connection between visually appropriate graphics and descriptive details.	Visually striking graphics and related descriptive details meld as one to form a powerful card.	
MECHANICS	Fatally attacked by many spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors.	Direct damage inflicted by several spelling, grammar, and/or punctuation errors.	Minor damage inflicted by 1–2 spelling, grammar, and/or punctuation errors.	Virtually invincible. Cannot be defeated by spelling, grammar, and/or punctuation errors.	

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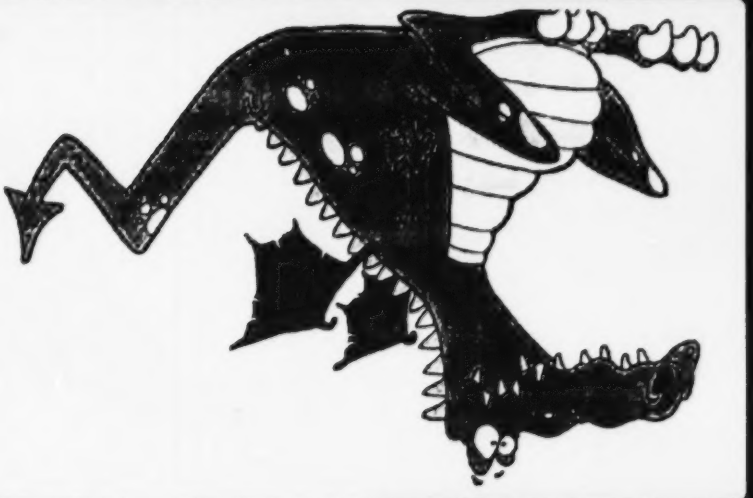
Monster Trading Card Example

Pink-spotted Winged Dragon



Herbert

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Name: Herbert
Monster Type: Pink-spotted Winged Dragon

Description: 12 feet tall, friendly male dragon who talks in riddles

Habitat: damp, mossy swamps

Prey/Food: dragonflies

Other Characteristics: hiccups bubbles when talking

← **Draw your monster here**

← **Fold here**

← **Describe your monster here**

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